DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 109 CS 214 318

AUTHOR Boswell, James, Jr.
TITLE Training Students Formally: A Rationale for a Three Credit Course.
PUB DATE 11 Apr 92
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association (Emmitsburg, MD, April 11, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Course Content; Course Descriptions; *Instructional Improvement; Instructional Innovation; Tutorial Programs; *Tutoring; *Tutors; Two Year Colleges; *Writing Laboratories
IDENTIFIERS *Harrisburg Area Community College PA

ABSTRACT

Writing center tutor training at Harrisburg Area Community College, Pennsylvania, was improved through the development and implementation of a 3-credit course. Professionals in the field, other professors at the institution, writing center tutors, and the community college administration were consulted in the development of the course. The course was given a "trial run" for two years before it was officially adopted as a permanent offering in the college catalog. Outside presenters address the class, and students spend three hours per week in the writing center. The course brings together instruction and hands-on experience. Students acquire skills in working with people and, through course work, are encouraged to do scholarly work. Students are given the opportunity to put theory into practice and later to report their experiences. The course developer/instructor feels that the course has been a joy to teach. Student evaluations have been above average. Generally, students who complete the course remain to tutor in the writing center. The course allows them the opportunity for intellectual stimulation and growth unlike any other course at the college. A chronology from the idea for the course to final adoption in the college catalog is attached. (RS)

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Training Students Formally

A Rationale for a Three Credit Course

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April 11, 1992

James Boswell, Jr.
Associate Professor of English
Harrisburg Area Community College

Training Writing Students Formally

A Rationale for a Three Credit Course

Tutor training is and can be accomplished in many ways. Stephen North's "Idea of A Writing Center," describes some of the misapprehension shared by our colleagues about what a writing center is supposed to do. I suppose that many may still see the writing center as a fix it shop. At a community college, some colleagues may see the writing center as a place staffed with well-meaning students with inadequate skills to really be of any assistance. David Klooster notes that "A writer walks in the door, sits quietly with a tutor, and waits passively for a tutor to act." (WLN, p. 1) The tutor must learn how to act. Thus, a well-defined program is necessary. Maureen Daly Goggin wrote that "..a well-trained tutoring staff is perhaps the most important key to effective tutoring." (WLN, p. 8) She outlines the following goals for an effective tutoring program: "To make tutors aware of the process they use when they write; to acquaint them with current research and practices in writing instruction; and to provide them with practical suggestions as well as experience in tutoring writing." (WLN, p. 8) I learned, after seven years as a Writing Center Tutorial Coordinator, I could not achieve the goals mentioned above through monthly training meetings attended on a hit-and-miss fashion. At the request of my supervisor, I went through the challenging process of proposing a three credit course for training tutors. I would like to discuss the process I had to go through, the course itself, and student accomplishments and reactions.

My adventure began in 1987 when I proposed to do research into improving tutor training at Harrisburg Area Community College. I was awarded a Summer Instructional grant to pursue this project. I consulted with Joanne Smith, then

Writing Center Director at the Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg, I wrote Muriel Harris at Purdue University, and I called Steve North since there was a course for tutors offered at his university. I also consulted with my Assistant Dean, Mike Dockery. I spent the summer of 1988 working on this project. My report on my activities was finally submitted to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. However, my major challenge was presentation of my course proposal to my colleagues. I had carefully reviewed North's syllabus. Harris gave ideas of textbooks--I decided to propose one written by Harris and the other text was edited by Professor Harris. Smith advised that I go all the way and propose a three credit course. A respected colleague suggested the name English for Tutors. Later, I conducted an informal survey of all writing center tutors, and each told me that they would be interested in taking a course in tutoring writing.

In the Spring, 1989, I presented the course to my colleagues where the concern was: "Would anyone take it for credit?" Some felt the idea might not work. Others argued students already have too many classes. It would cost them more. Some counseled that others would see my proposal as course proliferation. Ultimately, it was decided to allow the course to have a trial run. The college has a 282 series that allows a course to be offered for two years before it is approved as a permanent offering in the college catalogue. The course was first offered in the Spring, 1990 and every semester thereafter. As the two-year deadline approached, I submitted my proposal to be formally reviewed and approved by my division, the Dean, the curriculum and instruction committee and the Faculty Council. It was approved n the Fall, 1991 and will be offered as English 113. Thus, the adventure ended.

The course has been a joy to teach. I have found that in sixteen weeks of

instruction students are able to combine what they learn in the classroom as well as in the lab. It is thrilling to talk about writing lab experiences as well the current research. I have modeled the course after the course for tutors taught at SUNY-Albany. Also, what Maureen Goggin describes as important training activities has been modified to suit my class. In The Writing Lab Newsletter, she lists the following activities: "evaluating sample student writing, role playing, discussion of tutoring techniques, reading and discussing the current research, reading or seeing dramatizations of tutorial situations, journal writing, classroom observations, and three papers." (WNL, pp. 8-11) I have tried to incorporate each of these activities into the course syllabus. I have not done a lot with class observations. I would like to do more there. I have also added information on literacy issues, revision strategies, diagnosis, learning styles, and writing apprehension. I work to refine the writing skills of peer tutors as well.

I like what Joy Rouse mentioned in her article, "Tutor Recruitment and Training at Miami University." She describes a one credit course EDT 310 Methods in Tutoring Adults, where students learn "listening skills, diagnosis, supplemental instruction, and evaluation; study skills; and multicultural awareness." (WLN, 2) What makes the course exciting is that it becomes also a study in human relations, psychology, sociology, critical assessment and language. I call upon colleagues outside my discipline to make presentations. I have, for example, had the reference librarian and a colleague who teaches sociology to make presentations. I always invite an English instructor to share his or her expertise. I have asked writing center staff to assist in role play activities. I also assign to students art work and collages to enhance their understanding of the writing and tutoring process. I do not believe that my

objectives could be accomplished through infrequent meetings. Working with students and writing center staff make it possible to significantly develop the skills of peer writing tutors. Tutors at the community college do not have the same background as a junior or senior education major. However, I do believe that freshman or sophomore tutors at the community college can be very helpful, especially since they can show empathy with other students since they, too, have similar busy schedules.

Generally, students who complete the course will remain to tutor in the lab. Some will work in the lab for years. Several have been there for two years. Others will work off and on. Some volunteer their time. Course evaluations have been well above average. Many have told me personally that the course helped them to learn a lot. I know of three outstanding students who decided to become teachers as a result. The tutors are successful students who graduate and transfer to other colleges and universities. Each student has been recommended by one English professor. At least five have been inducted into Phi Theta Kappa, the honorary fraternity for community colleges. I have seen some students make significant progress in the course. Furthermore, they share these positive experiences with each other. I believe that they get to know each other better. Finally, I believe a true community of writers is formed.

Goggin points out that "Just as lectures, readings, and discussions do not teach students how to write--only writing will do this--similarly, ...techniques [alone] do not teach people how to tutor. Only through writing and tutoring can someone come to understand the process of both and thus become an effective tutor." (WNL, p. 11) I proposed a three credit tutoring course for precisely those reasons. Students need to write and tutor in order to learn how to be effective tutors. For Harrisburg Area Community College, the idea of a course

for writing tutors was an idea whose time had come. Teaching a small group of select students how to mold and shape the written word to later share that knowledge with their peers is a worthy, lofty goal for an academic community.

Thus, I find teaching a three credit tutoring course coupled with writing center experience, (students are expected to spend three hours a week in the lab), a unique arrangement. Students are paid for their time there. They are able to work with the professional staff: teachers, counselors, and administrators. This arrangement brings together instruction and hands on experience. The tutor is not trained in a haphazard manner. The tutor acquires skill in working with people and through course work, tutors are encouraged to do scholarly work. Finally, they are given the opportunity to put theory into practice and later to report their experiences. A three credit course allows them the opportunity for intellectual stimulation and growth unlike any other course at the college.

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FROM IDEA TO THREE CREDIT COURSE

PROPOSAL FOR INSTRUCTION GRANT	FALL 1987
FINAL DRAFT OF PROPOSAL	SPRING 1988
RESEARCH	SUMMER 1988
REPORT TO ADMINISTRATION	FALL 1988
PRESENTED TO COLLEAGUES	SPRING 1989
COURSE OFFERED 282	SPRING 19901992
APPROVED FACULTY COUNCIL	FALL 1991
OFFERED AS ENGLISH FOR TUTORS 113	FALL 1992